



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR-ELECT

170 State House Station | Augusta, Maine 04333

Janet T. Mills
Governor-Elect

December 6, 2018

RSU 54/MSAD #54 School District
Skowhegan Area Schools
Attention: Board of Directors and Superintendent Colbry
196 West Front Street
Skowhegan, ME 04976

Dear Chair Ring, Vice-Chair Charles, Superintendent Colbry and Members of the SAD 54 School Board:

I am writing to share my thoughts as the Board meets today to reconsider its 2015 vote to retain Skowhegan Area High School's Indian mascot and logo. I recognize that this is your school, and the logo is a great source of pride for this community. I also respect that the decision about the future of the mascot is yours to make, as it should be, and I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my thoughts on the matter.

As you know, many other school systems in Maine have wrestled with whether Native American mascots and imagery should be removed or changed to avoid causing unintentional offense. These decisions are difficult and emotional for many reasons. Our schools are often central to the identity of our communities. Indian mascots often were originally chosen in an effort to recognize and honor an area's unique connection to Native Americans. It can be difficult to accept that a gesture of respect made in good faith could have the opposite of its intended effect. But we have heard now from Maine Tribes, clearly and unequivocally, that Indian mascots, while meant to serve as a tribute, are instead a source of pain and anguish. I hope that that perspective is given great weight in your deliberations this evening.

On a more personal note, as you may know, I have deep ties to the Skowhegan community, having practiced law there for 14 years, and I have great affection for the hard-working, thoughtful people of the Skowhegan area. It is an extraordinary community. A mascot, of course, is a symbol of pride for any community. But it is not the source of its pride. The source of pride for a community is its people. While tonight you weigh a change in symbol, I hope you will remember that changing your mascot does not change you as a people. You are what makes the fabric of this community strong. If you select a new mascot, although difficult, I know this community will imbue it with that same deep pride.

I believe you have before you tonight an opportunity to demonstrate to our children and grandchildren that the community is capable of making difficult and uncomfortable decisions – but that, when made, those decisions bend toward justice, toward healing, and toward inclusivity. These are values worth imparting to our children, and they are values I believe this community holds dear.

I offer these views to you respectfully and I thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Janet T. Mills
Governor-Elect
State of Maine

JTM/mao

cc: Maulian Dana, Tribal Ambassador, Penobscot Nation